



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 5
77 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD
CHICAGO, IL 60604-3590

NOV 16 2009

REPLY TO THE ATTENTION OF:

E-19J

Jennifer Maziasz
Washburn Ranger District
Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest
113 East Bayfield Street
Washburn, Wisconsin 54891

Re: Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Northwest Sands Project, Washburn
Ranger District, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Bayfield County, Wisconsin
EIS No. 20090353

Dear Ms. Maziasz:

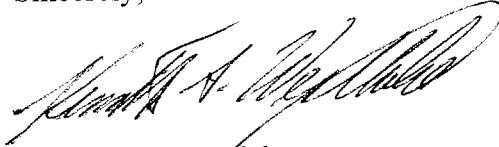
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has reviewed the U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) for the above-mentioned project in accordance with our responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act, the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA Implementing Regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

EPA assigned a rating of "Lack of Objections" to the Draft EIS in our August 17, 2009 letter. Based on our review of the Final EIS and ROD, we understand that the Proposed Action, Alternative 2, has been modified to address concerns expressed regarding the amount of open barren component for species dependent on open barrens. The single modification is an increase of 550 acres designated as open barrens, resulting in a total of 5,350 acres in that habitat type. With this modification, the project area will have the second largest acreage of open habitat available among the nine areas recognized by the State of Wisconsin as being managed for sharp-tailed grouse.

Despite our DEIS comment letter rating, we requested additional information pertaining to potential future projects by the USFS and/or other landowners that might increase the amount of open barrens in the general area. Response to comments indicated that USFS employees continue to discuss the possibility of expanding the barrens habitat across boundaries through partnerships. We applaud the USFS' efforts to expand the habitat and increase connectivity through partnerships.

Based on our review of the FEIS and ROD, we maintain our lack of objections to the proposed project. If you have any questions regarding the contents of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me or Kathleen Kowal of my staff at (312) 353-5206 or via email at kowal.kathleen@epa.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth A. Westlake", written in a cursive style.

Kenneth A. Westlake
Chief, NEPA Implementation Section
Office of Enforcement & Compliance Assurance

cc: Jim McDonald, Regional Environmental Coordinator, USFS, Milwaukee, WI